

Washington, D.C. - Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Congresswoman Melissa Bean (D-IL) today praised President Obama's decision to support legislative authority to the Navy and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to jointly operate the new "Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center". Language included in the budget summary of the VA signals the intent of the Administration to offer specific language regarding the Lovell Health Care Center. It is expected that the Administration will offer specific language in the coming weeks. The VA has been drafting language based on legislation introduced last Congress by Senator Durbin and the Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Daniel Akaka (D-HI).

"I commend President Obama for understanding the importance of making this historic partnership possible," said Durbin. "I have been working for nearly a decade on this health care center that combines the services of the North Chicago VA Medical Center and the Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes in order to better serve Illinois veterans. I will continue working with Senator Akaka and Congresswoman Bean in Washington to see that our shared goal is finally realized."

"I appreciate President Obama's commitment to our efforts to combine the VA Medical Center with the Naval Health Clinic, which will provide the necessary quality care to active duty personnel, veterans, and military retirees while saving the taxpayers \$80 million in construction costs," Bean said. "By using our resources efficiently and effectively, we'll be able to continue these necessary services for all of our veterans in a manner that they can easily access."

When complete the Lovell Federal Health Care Center will be the first health care facility in the nation to be operated jointly between the VA and the Navy saving taxpayers millions of dollars that would otherwise have been needed to rebuild or renovate the Navy's nearby hospital. However, without this legislation, the Center will not be able to provide essential services to thousands of military beneficiaries in the region. Beneficiaries who had previously received care at the Naval Health Clinic Great Lakes would either be ineligible for care or would be required to make a co-pay or have a cost-share for certain care, including emergency, hospitalization, outpatient, and behavioral health services. The facility is scheduled to begin joint operations on October 1, 2010.

Earlier this year, Durbin and Bean joined the Secretary of the VA, Eric Shinseki, at the Lovell Center for a round table discussion on the need for legislative language to clear the remaining hurdles in merging the Navy and VA hospitals at North Chicago. Secretary Shinseki's visit

followed a January meeting with Durbin, who stressed the importance of the efforts in North Chicago on the eve of Shinseki's confirmation.

Senator Durbin has played a major role over the last decade in the development of the new Lovell Federal Health Care Center. After the VA announced plans in 1999 to close the North Chicago VA Medical Center, he brought Illinois House and Senate members together to request an investigation into the possibility of having the Navy and the VA enter into a joint agreement for use of the facility. Senator Durbin later passed language requiring the Navy to expand the use of the hospital and to work with the VA to finalize site selection for the joint ambulatory care center and construction design.

Likewise, Congresswoman Bean has been dedicated to development of the joint center for years. In the 110th Congress and again in this Congress, she introduced legislation to designate the joint center as a military treatment facility. This will allow the transfer of property from a purely civilian use and will bring the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center into the TRICARE network for active duty personnel. Without this fix, active duty military families would be forced to pay a \$150 co-pay each time they see a doctor at the facility.